

STATEMENT BY MAJOR GENERAL ROGER P. LEMPKE

THE ADJUTANT GENERAL – NEBRASKA
AND DIRECTOR, NEBRASKA EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY
SUBCOMMITTEE ON MANAGEMENT, INVESTIGATIONS, AND OVERSIGHT

“EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF EQUIPMENT SHORTAGES ON THE NATIONAL
GUARD’S READINESS FOR HOMELAND SECURITY MISSIONS”

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Representative Carney and members of the House Committee on Homeland Security Subcommittee on Management, Investigations, and Oversight, I am Major General Roger P. Lempke, Adjutant General for Nebraska and President of the Adjutants General Association of the United States (AGAUS). Thank you for inviting me to testify in my capacity as President of the AGAUS representing the Adjutants General of the 50 states, three territories, and District of Columbia. As the nation enters hurricane season, tornado season, flooding season, and fire season the timing is perfect to review the capability of the National Guard to support civil authorities in responding to the full array of disasters that can bring significant harm to citizens and infrastructure.

The title of this hearing, “Examining the Impact of Equipment Shortages on the National Guard’s Readiness for Homeland Security Missions,” appropriately summarizes a situation that concerns all Governors and Adjutants General. The National Guard has always been under equipped. Prior to 9/11 the equipment situation varied widely. Designated units received priority on certain equipment items while other units trained on substitute equipment and some units had little to no equipment. Overall, the equipment level for the National Guard stood in the seventy percent range of designated critical items, but in reality many units had barely enough equipment to train with.

The loss of National Guard equipment to fighting terrorism overseas has caused two issues. First, the equipment most valued for disaster response has been that most often not returned from overseas—HUMVEES, trucks, communications equipment, engineering, and helicopters to name a few items. Secondly, equipment shortages have become uniform and widespread. No state can claim to be in good shape when assessing its equipment situation and

each Adjutant General worries that other states may not be able to make up for shortfalls within their individual states if a large disaster, or series of disasters, occur.

My quick poll of the Adjutants General prior to this hearing revealed most states hovering in the forty to fifty percent of equipment required to “go to war.” While most Adjutants General believe they have sufficient equipment to deal with single disasters common to their states, they fear insufficient quantities to deal with multiple disasters in their states or having to send equipment to support a regional disaster such as Katrina. I would characterize the national situation as being “equipment shallow” among the states. My testimony will expand on what I mean by “equipment shallow.”

First, it is important to understand how equipment readiness is reported. Units in each state have standard lists of equipment needed for their wartime mission. Readiness is reported against these lists. The commonly reported equipment fill in the National Guard of fifty percent or less measures the readiness of National Guard units to accomplish their wartime mission. To my knowledge no similar measurement has been developed to uniformly assess the capability of National Guard units to support homeland security needs.

Adjutants General assess three factors with regard to equipment. The first is the capability of units to accomplish their wartime mission. A system exists for reporting the status of units for qualified personnel, training, and equipment to National Guard Bureau and ultimately the Army. The second factor is having sufficient equipment to train with. Typically, training can be effectively accomplished when less than fully equipped, but at some point the capability to effectively training diminishes due to equipment shortages. Finally, Adjutants General assess the quantity and location of equipment to provide disaster response and recovery

in their states. It is this last factor that has no consistent set of guidelines and is often confused with wartime readiness. On one hand every Adjutant General responding to my query reported severe shortages in equipment on hand for their wartime missions; but on the other hand they generally reported sufficient equipment for responding to typical disasters in their states, with some exceptions, such as helicopters in those states whose aviation units are deployed.

Let me use a Nebraska example. The Army National Guard in Nebraska should have 324 five-ton trucks to equip all our transportation units for their wartime missions. Yet, I have only 147. For wartime mobilization Nebraska could field only half the units available because of this shortage (some of our trucks are old model substitutes which could not be sent overseas). But having 147 five-ton trucks positioned throughout the state has certainly been sufficient to respond to disasters in the state which have included a major tornado which destroyed a town about one third the size of Greensburg, Kansas; the largest wild fire in about ten years in western Nebraska; a major ice storm which knocked out power in central Nebraska and became the most costly natural disaster in Nebraska history. I could repeat this same story for most equipment on Nebraska equipment lists. If called upon to support EMAC requests as we did for Louisiana and Mississippi when Hurricane Katrina struck I would have to think longer and harder before recommending to my Governor that Nebraska send equipment out of the state.

With an understanding that a system for assessing National Guard capability to support homeland disaster response is lacking let me provide a summary of the comments received from my fellow Adjutants General regarding equipment.

- Rotary wing aircraft are at a premium because losses from war and accidents have depleted the CH-47 and UH-60 fleet. Additionally, for the first time a National Guard

aviation brigade deployed to Iraq last year which depleted the number available for homeland security needs. The 36th Aviation Brigade will return this fall and time will be needed to restore its aircraft. In the mean time a second National Guard aviation brigade is preparing to deploy.

- Engineering equipment was at a premium before the war and much of it that was shipped overseas has stayed there. Earth moving equipment is needed for most major disasters and priority in replacing this equipment is important to restoring our overall capability to meet homeland security needs.
- Many Adjutants General pointed to communications, and specifically interoperability, as major concerns. Modern Army communication equipment is often left overseas. When coupled with rapid improvements in local and state communications systems the National Guard is falling behind in its ability to quickly attach to a local area communications grid set up to deal with a disaster.
- Chemical detection and protection gear and equipment. This has been a chronic problem for the National Guard. Although many Chemical units exist they are usually chronically under equipped for their critical mission.

Hopefully, I have adequately explained the problem. What we now seek are solutions. Congress has already acknowledged the severe equipment shortage facing the National Guard and taken action to direct several billion dollars to fix the problem. However, specifying funds and actually having them wind up where needed to fix the problem are two different things. Funding has been promised before only to be diverted once in the hands of the Department of Defense to other priorities. First and foremost legislation is needed that will direct the Department of Defense to embrace homeland security needs and establish mechanisms to ensure these needs are addressed along with its mission to fight the nation's wars.

The National Guard Empowerment Act of 2007 introduced as H.R. 718 by Representative Tom Davis (R-VA) and Gene Taylor (D-MS) contains provisions to specifically deal with National Guard equipping issues. Section 7 of this legislation calls for specific reporting by DoD that will ensure funds intended for equipping the National Guard actually result in equipment arriving at units. It will also provide Congress the information needed to assess whether sufficient National Guard equipment is available for homeland security needs. It also elevates the Chief, National Guard Bureau, to four-star rank and assigns the responsibility of chief advisor to the Secretary of Defense on National Guard matters, particularly those related to supporting civil authorities during domestic emergencies. Other sections of the legislation also seek to strengthen the National Guard's ability to support homeland security needs.

The information I have shows that Representatives Carney (D-PA), DeFazio (D-OR), Perlmutter (D-CO), and King (R-NY) on this subcommittee are co-sponsors of H.R. 718. I would recommend that all members of this subcommittee review this legislative initiative and become co-sponsors. The equipping problem will take a long time to resolve and legislation that will keep the Department of Defense focused on this issue is vital to success.

The next recommendation is to fully fund critical helicopter procurement and modernization programs. The UH-60 Blackhawk and CH-47 are workhorses in Afghanistan and Iraq and essential capabilities for responding to disasters in-state and regionally. In total, the National Guard is short approximately 130 UH-60 Blackhawk and 30 CH-47 Chinook helicopters. The Army plan to restore its helicopter fleet to full strength must be given top funding priority. Along with this modernization programs that bring National Guard helicopters to the latest configurations are also important. Nebraska used borrowed UH-60's to fight

wildfires last fall. These helicopters had engine and transmission modifications that Nebraska's deployed helicopters do not have. With these modifications the "loaners" were able to carry larger water loads with faster turnaround times. Finally, the procurement of the UH-72 light utility helicopter begins in FY08. This aircraft brings a unique combination of versatility and lost operating cost that will prove vital to enhancing the National Guard's ability to respond to homeland security needs.

My final recommendation concerns the Joint Cargo Aircraft, or JCA. The National Guard's tactical airlift flight of C-130's is smaller now, due to BRAC and other reasons, than when Hurricane Katrina hit in 2005. The JCA is slated to fill the gap. The program will field an off-the-shelf aircraft for the Army and Air Force to meet short haul battlefield needs while also serving as a primary asset for moving National Guard assets quickly to disasters nationwide. The program cannot afford a delay.

Recent language inserted into the House National Defense Authorization Bill for FY08 would restrict funds for the JCA program until certain reports and other actions are accomplished by DoD. The Adjutants General certainly appreciate the frustration Congress must feel in not being able to review studies and reports that address the situation with the nation's airlift fleet. We would only ask that the JCA not become the pawn in dealing with this issue.

If the JCA is not fielded as currently scheduled several negative impacts will result. First, the Army National Guard will not be able to replace the aging C-23 Sherpa aircraft. Second, the Air National Guard will not be able to place the JCA at locations the BRAC legislation directed the removal of current mission aircraft and replacement with new mission

aircraft. Third, the National Guard tactical airlift fleet available for disaster support will be diminished in numbers and breadth of national coverage.

On behalf of the Adjutants General I ask the subcommittee to consult with colleagues involved with the authorizations process to seek way to obtain their information with jeopardizing the JCA schedule.

It has been said that a rising tide raises all boats. So it is with National Guard equipment. Funding already identified for National Guard must result in the consistent flow of equipment to units of all kinds to all states throughout the nation. We need this equipment to be ready for the next fight to defeat terrorism for certain. Achieving reasonably high equipment levels for the war fight will also ensure sufficient equipment is available to support civil authorities responding to disasters. Thank you for your interest in this topic vital to the safety of Americans.